

Music Review

Engaging performance of a novel work

Trio La Milpa offers Beethoven piece written for 2 oboes and English horn

By TIM SMITH
SUN MUSIC CRITIC

Even longtime, avid Beethoven fans may not know he ever wrote a trio for the unlikely combination of two oboes and English horn, while those well aware of the fact have probably had precious few opportunities to hear that music performed in concert.

So the novelty factor was pronounced Tuesday night at An die Musik, where the Trio La Milpa offered not just the Beethoven piece, but works by two other composers who likewise found inspiration in this unusu-

ally reedy form.

Three woodwind instruments are capable of producing only so much musical activity. Chords are obviously limited, and, in this particular two oboe, one English horn grouping, so is texture. But Beethoven wasn't about to let such limitations hold him back.

His C major Trio, Op. 87, written in 1794, not long after he made Vienna his home, is rich in melodic content, color and action. The long-breathed Adagio and galloping Scherzo make especially vivid impressions, but the whole score shines, as the Trio La Milpa demonstrated winningly.

The well-matched ensemble takes its name from a restaurant where the members used to hang out a few years ago when they were all in the Richmond Symphony in Virginia. Today, two of those members are in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

— principal oboe Katherine Needleman and second oboe Michael J. Lisicky (who plays English horn in the trio). The third, Sandra Gerster, is former principal oboe of the Hartford Symphony in Connecticut.

The rest of the program was somewhat less substantive, but hardly less engaging.

Johann Wenzl, an 18th-century, Vienna-based composer whose music largely Wenzl with the wind once it had to be compared with that of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, was represented by his pleasant *Diverfimento* in B-flat.

Contemporary Dutch composer Jan Koetsier revisited the past, without adding any distinctive perspective from the present, in his 1961 *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Bach*.

The players delivered both pieces with the same technical quality and expressive anima-

tion that characterized their Beethoven. I only wish An die Musik's comfy concert room had more reverberation (any reverberation, for that matter) to give the trio's sound more bloom.

An die Musik also presented a first-class piano recital this week. Enrico Ellsi, a former Peabody student of Leon Fleisher and currently a faculty member at the University of Nevada, revealed remarkable sensitivity, imagination and polish in a recital Sunday night.

He brought clarity and subtlety to Bach's Partita No. 6, considerable eloquence to Mozart's F major Sonata, K. 332. And his phrasing of two Masarikos and the G minor *Balade* by Chopin contained uncommon rhythmic elasticity and poetic refinement. That is due back at An die Musik in August, to accompany BSO concertmaster Jonathan Carney in a recital.